4-21-72

Washington Merry-Go-Round

by JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — The Senate inquiry started Richard Kleindienst to remove the cloud over his head has now ended. But the cloud, instead of dissolving, has burgeoned into a major weather system that is likely to darken Republican skies until November.

Kleindienst's nomination to be attorney general may survive the scandal over his secret dealings with ITT on antitrust matters, he insisted publicly were "handled and negotiated exclusively" by his subordinates.

It may also survive the revelation that he excused a blundering U.S. Attorney who was guilty of what the Justice Department itself testified was "highly improper conduct."

President Nixon's credibility as the white knight of "law and order" clearly has not survivied. If he is confirmed as attorney general, Kleindienst will only remind the public of the squalid ITT affair.

The Kleindienst hearings were the longest confirmation proceeding in history, but they left the Senate Judiciary Committee no closer to the truth at the end than at the beginning.

The main reason is that the record was polluted with more perjury than any similar Senate inquiry has heard. Witness after witness, nearly all of them on the same side of the issue, gave flatly contradictory testimony.

The ITT commitment to the Republican convention was, by various accounts, $100,000, $200,000, $400,000 and $600,000. Dita Beard, the ITT lobbyist, admitted to us she wrote a memo to her boss linking the commitment to the antitrust cases.

Later she said she wrote some of the memo, but not the most damaging parts. But her secretary remembered typing most of it, including incriminating parts Mrs. Beard said she had never seen before.

Mrs. Beard said she hand-delivered her memo to her boss, William Merriam. But he testified under oath he never got it. Representative Bob Wilson, R-Calif., said in a taped interview that Merriam had acknowledged receiving the memo. Wilson also said Mrs. Beard admitted writing the entire incriminating memo, not just parts of it. But Wilson reversed himself under oath.

Mrs. Beard's testimony was taken in a Denver hospital room where she claimed to be suffering from heart trouble. It was cut short by a relapse which occurred just as her story was beginning to crumble under cross examination.

Later, two independent heart specialists informed the Judiciary Committee their examination of the woman revealed no objective evidence of heart trouble.

By the time all the testimony had been heard, the only certainty was that a large number of witnesses had lied under oath.

None of this seemed to bother Judiciary Chairman Jim Eastland, who announced the day the hearings started that Kleindienst was clean and rigged the hearings to prove his prejudgment.

When things were going badly for Kleindienst, Eastland repeatedly introduced surprise pro-Kleindienst witnesses to seize the spotlight and the morning headlines. On other occasions, he gaveled the hearings into recess when embarrassing information was coming out.

We gave the committee the original Dita Beard memo as evidence. The next thing we knew, it had been secretly delivered to Kleindienst's executive assistant. He passed it to the FBI for analysis, but it was subsequently slipped to ITT.

This backdoor maneuver indicated better than the sworn testimony the incestuous relationship between Justice and ITT. The giant conglomerate, after all, had acknowledged that it had shredded documents pertaining to the antitrust case. ITT turned the memo over to several experts of questionable credibility who reached conclusions that contradicted the FBI's analysis of the document.

Throughout the hearings, Eastland held repeated secret meetings with White House and Justice Department officials, including White House lobbyist Clark MacGregor and Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian.

In the end, the Judiciary Committee deadlocked seven to seven over whether to continue the investigation. If Chairman Eastland had not sided with the Republicans, the hearings would have continued.

Richard Kleindienst called for the hearings to clear his name. When they began, there was not a single committee member against him. But the hearings ended over the protest of half the committee.

Ballot Stuffing — General Electric has pressured its employes to use the popular "Advocates" TV show as a means of getting GE some fat contracts for the controversial space shuttle. In a memo, GE urged its workers to watch the recent "Advocates" debate on whether Congress should fund the dubious NASA project. The GE memo noted that the TV show solicits viewers' "pro" and "con" votes on its debates and then makes the totals "available to Congress for their use in the decision process." As a means of influencing Congress, the company asked all employes to write not only to the "Advocates," but to their senators and congressmen.

Farm Subsidy? — When the big poultry and livestock producers were lining up a team to kill a farm support bill, they turned to an unusual combination of farm state senators. Among those enlisted to vote against aid to corn- and wheat farmers were Senators Bob Dole, R-Kans., and Herman Talmadge, D-Ga. In recent years, Dole has picked up a $1,500 honorarium from the Associated Milk Producers and another $500 from Farmland Industries, Inc. And Talmadge received a $600 honorarium from the Southeastern Poultry and Egg Association. These generous donors all had an interest in seeing the bill defeated.